

REMARKS

The specification has been amended to correct a minor typographical error.

The Examiner provisionally rejected Claims 1-7, 15, and 16 under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting in view of co-pending application Serial No. 09/408,747. That application matured into U.S. Patent No. 6,477,774 on November 12, 2002. A terminal disclaimer will be prepared and filed to obviate this provisional rejection.

The Examiner rejected Claims 1-7, 15, and 16 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being obvious in view of the combined teachings of the applicant's admitted prior art in view of the Mills et al. reference. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 1 now defines the invention as a method for manufacturing a vehicle frame component including the steps of (a) providing a workpiece; (b) performing a scanning retrogression heat treatment process on the workpiece in a continuous and longitudinal manner from one end to the other to soften the workpiece; and (c) while the workpiece remains softened, deforming the workpiece to form a vehicle frame component.

Clearly, the Mills et al. reference does not show or suggest the claimed step of performing a scanning retrogression heat treatment process on the workpiece in a continuous and longitudinal manner from one end to the other. The Mills et al. reference relates to the hot working of metallic components, which is quite different from the claimed scanning retrogression heat treatment process, which is a cold working process that is performed after quenching. Thus, it is believed that the claims are clearly patentable over the art of record.

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IN THE SPECIFICATION

Replace the paragraph beginning on Page 3, Line 29 with the following new paragraph:

It is well known that vehicle frame components are usually manufactured in relatively large quantities. Therefore, to insure optimum efficiency in the manufacturing operation, any process to be performed on a vehicle frame component must be capable of being performed in a relatively quick and efficient manner. Although it is known to perform a retrogression heat treatment process on a vehicle frame component prior to bending the component, as discussed above, such known methods have [not] been found to be undesirably slow in the context of the manufacture of vehicle frame components. Thus, it would be desirable to provide an improved apparatus method for manufacturing a vehicle frame component that allows a preliminary heat treatment process to be performed in a relatively quick and easy manner so as to facilitate the subsequent performance of a bending or other deforming process.

IN THE CLAIMS

Substitute the following amended claims for the pending claims of the same number:

1. A method for manufacturing a vehicle frame component comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a workpiece;

(b) performing a scanning retrogression heat treatment process on the workpiece in a continuous and longitudinal manner from one end to the other to soften the workpiece; and

(c) while the workpiece remains softened, deforming the workpiece to form a vehicle frame component.